

# Man in Byzantine Historiography from John Malalas to Michael Psellos

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The problem of “man in literature” has been a topic of lively discussion by scholars in our century,<sup>1</sup> but Alexander Kazhdan was the first to treat it using Byzantine material.<sup>2</sup> The topic itself interested him only as part of a much larger problem, namely, that of “*homo byzantinus*”—a notion introduced by Kazhdan and since then popular among Byzantinists.<sup>3</sup> Kazhdan not only delineated the problem, but also tried to find ways of solving it. The author of this paper, who actively collaborated with Kazhdan in the latter’s pre-emigrant years and considers himself his pupil in certain aspects, has also studied this problem basing his research mainly on the writings of Michael Psellos.<sup>4</sup>

I used to share the opinion that the figure of Psellos was unique in Byzantine literature and that the peculiar place he occupied was largely due to his outstanding ability to penetrate human psychology and to depict his characters. Indeed, in the *Chronography* Psellos proved that he was able to use such methods of portrayal as would hardly be expected of a medieval writer and is more typical of modern men of letters. Because of this ability, Psellos has been compared by modern scholars to

Shakespeare and Dostoyevsky. I then tried to find in the literature before Psellos authors, and especially historiographers, who could be regarded as his predecessors, but I came to the conclusion that the brilliant descriptions of personages in the *Chronography* were exclusively due to the personal talent of the writer and had no parallels in contemporary literature. I still admire the talent of Psellos, but a close reading of Byzantine historical authors made me think that Psellos’ personal abilities were not the only thing to be taken into account in judging the level of his skill. I hope to demonstrate that, for all his skill, Psellos stood at the apex of a long process of evolution in Byzantine historiography. The problem is too complex to be treated comprehensively in one paper. Here it can only be outlined, not solved.

In order to sketch the evolution of the art of depicting characters in Byzantine historiography, it seems reasonable to turn to the very beginning of the genre, to the *Chronography* of John Malalas. The reason why he is regarded here as the originator of Byzantine historiography is as follows. Since K. Krumbacher a distinction has consistently been made between two strands in Byzantine historiography: chronicles and histories. According to Krumbacher, these strands differ in every detail, from the figures of the author and reader to the style and language of historiography.<sup>5</sup> Most scholars adopted this theory, although it soon became obvious that many works could not be classed with either strand or, vice versa, could be related equally to both of them. As early as twenty years ago, H.-G. Beck tried to undermine the theory of separate “subgenres” of historiography going their own way through the thousand years of Byzantine

<sup>1</sup>See the main works dealing with the problem in antique and medieval literature in: F. Winkelmann, “Überlegungen zu Problemen des frühbyzantinischen Menschenbildes,” *Klio* 65 (1983), 441 note 3, 442 note 4.

<sup>2</sup>A. Kazhdan. “Der Mensch in der byzantinischen Literaturgeschichte,” *JÖB* 28 (1979) 1–21; A. Kazhdan and A. Epstein. *Change in Byzantine Culture in the Eleventh and Twelfth Centuries* (Berkeley, 1985), 197 ff.

<sup>3</sup>A. Kazhdan and G. Constable, *People and Power in Byzantium: An Introduction to Modern Byzantine Studies* (Washington, D.C., 1982). This book was considered by many reviewers as “very provocative.” F. Winkelmann, “Überlegungen,” 442 note 4, noted that A. Kazhdan left many questions unanswered. But this is inevitable and not a matter of reproach, in a pioneering study of this kind.

<sup>4</sup>J. Ljubarskij, “Istoričeskij geroj ‘Hronografii’ Mihaila Psella,” *VizVrem* 34 (1972), 92–114; idem, *Mihail Psell. Ličnost i tvorčestvo. K istorii vizantijskogo predgumanizma* (Moscow, 1978).

<sup>5</sup>K. Krumbacher, *Geschichte der byzantinischen Literatur* (Munich, 1897), 219 ff.

history.<sup>6</sup> Some scholars shared this view, others rejected it, still others took an intermediate position.<sup>7</sup> There is no need to pile up further arguments in support of any of these points of view. In my opinion the problem in general cannot be solved once and for all; it demands a historical approach. As I have tried to show elsewhere, chronicles and histories developed independently and were really separate genres only in the first period of Byzantine history, down to the beginning of the tenth century.<sup>8</sup> For instance, the histories of Procopius, Agathias, and Theophylactus Simocatta belonged to the subgenre of historiography, while in the same period the works of John Malalas, John of Antioch, and the *Chronicon Paschale* formed a chronographical line. The crucial distinction is to be sought not in literary qualities or peculiarities of language, nor even in the different social status of their authors and readers. They were different because they belonged to different stages in the development of the genre. While historians maintained and continued (rather than restored!) the classical tradition, with its artistic skill and the moral and mental values of antiquity, writers of chronicles, reflecting quite another mentality, rejected the achievements of classical literature and returned to the initial point: in broad outline, to the stage of Greek logography and Roman annalistics. From this point of view chronicles and histories are not different subgenres, but different stages in the evolution of historiography. (Making such a statement, one should not forget that the first chronicles appeared already in antiquity and some of them were quite sophisticated. The history of literature is much more complicated than the schemes we try to put on it.) Malalas' work is the first specimen of a chronicle created on Byzantine soil<sup>9</sup> and we begin our discussion with it. There is

another reason why Malalas' *Chronography* is worth analyzing here. Unique as it seems, it was in reality only one link in the long chain of many similar works unfortunately now lost.<sup>10</sup>

Classical historiography knew many methods of depicting historical characters. Most of these methods proved absolutely useless for Malalas and the chroniclers who were his contemporaries. There were many reasons for it, but first and foremost it was a change in approach to man and his role in history. In contrast to antiquity, the human being was considered much more dependent on divine authority, devoid of influence on the course of events.<sup>11</sup> It is not the hero who is placed at the center of the narrative, but events, and not the events themselves but their chronological order and the sacral meaning contained in it.<sup>12</sup> This is the main reason why the hero, who had previously been the compositional center of the story, now moved to the background and became the formal subject of the action. This is the reason why his feelings, emotions, and qualities became less interesting to writers. The range of the hero's emotions was very limited, and one can easily draw up an inventory of his or her feelings. Most often Malalas' heroes "become vexed" (ἀγανακτεῖν) or "irritated" (ἀργεῖν) or "fall in love." These words are constantly repeated, and one may even get an impression that Malalas' characters can have no other emotions. It should be noted that the connection between a feeling and the action that results from it is presented as instantaneous and immediate. As soon as the hero gets vexed, for example, an action follows: he kills or beats his enemy or does something without reflection or any other form of delay. This connection between emotions and deeds is typical of folklore and of archaic forms of literature, and in this respect Malalas' book represents an archaic stage of literature.

The same holds for the inventory of epithets applied to active personages. Some of them occur once or twice; two or three can be found constantly, but all are very simple and generalizing and invariate in nature. Almost all men in Malalas are wise (σοφός), while women are beautiful (εὐπρεπής). A connection exists between the qualities of heroes and their deeds and actions, but this

<sup>6</sup> H.-G. Beck, "Zur byzantinischen Mönchschronik," in idem, *Ideen und Realitäten in Byzanz* (London, 1972), XVI.

<sup>7</sup> Some modern works concerning the problem: V. Tapkova-Zaimova, "Die byzantinische Chronographie. Wesen und Tendenzen," *Jahrbuch für Geschichte des Feudalismus* 8 (Berlin, 1984), 52 ff. J. Ferber, "Theophanes' Account of the Reign of Heraclius," *Byzantine Papers. Proceedings of the First Australian Byzantine Studies Conference* (Canberra, 1981), 32 ff.

<sup>8</sup> J. Ljubarskij, "Problema evolucii vizantijskoj istoriografii," in *Literatura i iskusstvo v sisteme culturi* (Moscow, 1988), 39. Idem, "Neue Tendenzen in der Erforschung der byzantinischen Historiographie," *Klio* 69 (1987), 560–66.

<sup>9</sup> We do not touch here many debatable questions relating to the *Chronography* of Malalas. In spite of the lack of a critical edition, the study of Malalas' work has been intensified in the last decade mostly thanks to the efforts of a number of Australian Byzantinists; see E. Jeffreys et al., *Studies in John Malalas*, *Byzantina Australiensia* 6 (Sydney, 1990).

<sup>10</sup> See B. Croke, "The Early Development of Byzantine Chronicles," in Jeffreys et al., *Studies*, 28.

<sup>11</sup> See references to the literature in F. Winkelmann, "Überlegungen," 447 note 21.

<sup>12</sup> J. Beaucamp et al., "Temps et histoire. 1. Le prologue de la Chronique Pascale," *TM* 7 (1979), 273 ff.

connection is also instantaneous and immediate, and, moreover, as a rule is expressed by the same construction with ὡς. For instance, somebody falls in love with a girl because she is beautiful (ὁς εὐπρεπής), or somebody is revered because he is wise (ὁς σοφός), and so on. Here again one can speak of folklore or an archaic type of literature.

The scant, colorless descriptions of active figures are at first sight in stark contrast to the many detailed descriptions applied in Malalas' work to some mythological and historical personages. These descriptions, rightly called *somatopsychogrammata*,<sup>13</sup> are of a peculiar nature and different from the characterization of heroes in modern literature. First of all, they seem to be indispensable in the *Chronography* and their absence in some cases from the only extant manuscript can be easily explained by the transformation of the original text.<sup>14</sup> Second, the place of *somatopsychogrammata* in the narrative is always fixed. Almost invariably they follow the first mention of the hero and are introduced in the same way by ἦν δε. Third, *somatopsychogrammata* are formulaic in nature and are organized as certain structural entities. The order of epithets within them is also strictly fixed. They almost always begin with, so to speak, "external" epithets concerning the outward appearance of the hero, then the ethical epithets follow. In its turn, the order of external attributes does not vary: height, stature, color of hair, eyes, and so on, with very little deviation. The very choice of epithets is limited, and they can easily be brought together into some kind of inventory. For instance, the hero's height is characterized as μακρός (23 times), κονδοειδής (20), διμοιριαῖος (16), εὐμήκης (6), μέγας (5), εὐήλιξ (4). As to his chest, the hero can be εὐσθήτος (10 times) or εὐθώραξ (4).<sup>15</sup>

Fourth, all the epithets in *somatopsychogrammata* are placed on the same level without any sign of hierarchical order. No single one of them can be considered as a distinctive feature or as the character's main quality. Fifth, the epithets themselves are absolutely neutral, with no trace of emotional coloring. Sixth (last but not least), all the attributes in *somatopsychogrammata* are absolutely uncon-

nected with one another—a construction called asyndetic.

To the mind of modern readers these characterizations seem at least tasteless, and nineteenth-century scholars spoke of them with derision;<sup>16</sup> J. Fürst, for instance, called them "Polizeiliche Signalement" (police description),<sup>17</sup> and they really are much more like an identification card for a criminal or missing person than a literary description of character. The *somatopsychogrammata* seem truly funny if they are considered to be a reflection of reality, but in fact they have nothing to do with reality. The same attributes, often in the same order, are applied to different personages having nothing in common with each other. For instance, who could be less alike than Odysseus and St. Paul? Yet in Malalas' work almost the same epithets in almost the same sequence are applied to both.<sup>18</sup>

If *somatopsychogrammata* had nothing to do with reality, some questions arise: what was the reason for employing them and what was their origin? Many scholars tried to answer these questions. Some saw their archetype in the description of persons in the business papyri of Egypt,<sup>19</sup> some referred to "eikonismoi" widespread in rhetorical literature,<sup>20</sup> others tried to combine these different points of view.<sup>21</sup> In any case, outward similarity was taken to be a decisive argument for genetic dependence. In my opinion, the problem of the origin and essence of *somatopsychogrammata* has to be discussed on a broader and more solid basis.

First of all, *somatopsychogrammata* can be found not only in Malalas' work but also in many other works of Byzantine literature, especially in historiography and rhetoric. They occur in the compositions of the so-called "Scriptor Incertus de Leone Armenio," Pseudo-Symeon, Leo the Deacon, etc.; in the form of "eikonismos" they remained in rhetorical speeches to the end of the Byzantine Empire. Moreover, *somatopsychogrammata* were an almost indispensable ingredient in the historical compositions of other nations in the Middle Ages. They are constantly present in western medieval

<sup>13</sup> See H. Hunger, *Die hochsprachliche profane Literatur der Byzantiner*, I (Munich, 1978), 322.

<sup>14</sup> See E. Patzig, review of J. Fürst, "Untersuchungen" (below note 17), *BZ* 13 (1904), 178.

<sup>15</sup> For the inventory of epithets in chronological order, see E. and M. Jeffreys, "Portraits," in Jeffreys et al., *Studies*, 232–40; cf. J. Ljubarskij, "Geroi 'Chronografi' Ioanna Malaly," in *Kavkazi Vizantija*, 6 (Erevan, 1988).

<sup>16</sup> E. Rohde, *Der griechische Roman und seine Vorläufer* (Leipzig, 1986), 151 note 1.

<sup>17</sup> J. Fürst, "Untersuchungen zur Ephemeris des Dykty von Kreta," *Philologus* 61 (1902), 375 ff.

<sup>18</sup> See Patzig, rev. of Fürst, "Untersuchungen," 179. Malalas' text is edited in *Ioannis Malalae chronographia*, Bonn ed. (1831).

<sup>19</sup> Fürst, "Untersuchungen," 375.

<sup>20</sup> See G. Misener, "Iconistic Portraits," *CPh* 19 (1924), 97–123.

<sup>21</sup> See E. and M. Jeffreys, "Portraits" (above, note 15).

<sup>22</sup> See H. Vogt, *Die literarische Personendarstellung des frühen Mittelalters* (Leipzig-Berlin, 1932, repr. 1972).

chronicles,<sup>22</sup> one can find them in Russian chronicles mostly in the form of obituary notices.<sup>23</sup> Their "forerunners" can easily be found in historical and rhetorical works of late antiquity.<sup>24</sup> As a whole, *somatopsychogrammata* were a dominant way of describing characters in the historiography of more than ten centuries. In spite of differences between epochs and nations, they sometimes reveal an astonishing likeness of content and structure. This likeness is especially impressive in the coincidence of details. For instance, most *somatopsychogrammata* are introduced by the same formula: ἦν δε (Greek), *erat enim, fuit autem* (Latin), бе же (Russian). Partly these correspondences can be accounted for by their common origin, but the long life and stability of the *somatopsychogrammata* demand another explanation.

It has already been observed that every artistic device in a piece of literature does not exist separately but is connected with, and even demands, other corresponding devices.<sup>25</sup> One can also argue that *somatopsychogrammata* were not isolated phenomena in the method of medieval historical writings in general or of Malalas in particular. As has already been pointed out, the main feature of the *somatopsychogrammata* was their totally asyndetic character (epithets equal in value juxtaposed with no sign of hierarchical dependence or connection). Such a juxtaposition was not only proper to the elements of a hero's characterization, but was, rather, a distinctive, general feature of early medieval historiography (if not literature as a whole). I have discussed the correspondence between *somatopsychogrammata* and other elements of Malalas' *Chronography* elsewhere.<sup>26</sup> It can be seen most clearly in the composition and language of early medieval works of historiography. Chronicles of the early Middle Ages were composed of separate entries dealing with events totally isolated from their milieu. These entries were juxtaposed the way the details of a portrait are accumulated in *somatopsychogrammata*. Most phrases in chronicles are paratactic, that is, they are composed of equivalent sentences connected with the conjunctions καὶ, *et*, и, and so on, according to the language of

<sup>22</sup> See B. Rybakov, *Russkie letopisi i avtor Slova o Polku Igoreve*, (Moscow, 1972), 364 ff.

<sup>23</sup> E. C. Evans, "Roman Descriptions of Personal Appearance," *HSCP* 46 (1935), 43–84.

<sup>24</sup> See V. Žirmunskij, "Zadači poetiki," in idem, *Teorija literatury, poetika, stilistica* (Leningrad, 1977), 34.

<sup>25</sup> J. Ljubarskij, "'Chronografija' Ioanna Malaly: Problemy kompoziciji," in *Festschrift für Fairy von Lilienfeld* (Erlangen, 1982), 422.

the chronicle,<sup>27</sup> and thus juxtaposed to each other in the same manner. Parataxis is the right word to describe this main peculiarity of the style (in the broad sense of the word) of early medieval literature.<sup>28</sup> There can be no doubt that parataxis, as opposed to hypotaxis, is not only the most common principle of the organization of text in chronicles but a reflection of a certain mode of thinking in the early Middle Ages. That is the reason why *somatopsychogrammata* (and, in any case, their method of depicting characters) endured so long in Byzantine historiography. For early chronicles to reject the use of *somatopsychogrammata* and the asyndetic, paratactic method of presentation of characters in general would have meant rejecting their own nature.

It would be tempting to analyze from this point of view the fragments of the *Chronography* of Malalas' contemporary John of Antioch. These fragments contain minute descriptions of some emperors, and some are composed exclusively of facts and anecdotes intended to characterize the rulers.<sup>29</sup> Facts and anecdotes are combined here in the same asyndetic way as the isolated elements of *somatopsychogrammata* and thus retain the paratactic principle of construction. Unfortunately, such analysis is hardly possible before solving many textual problems, first and foremost the question of the priority of the so-called "Constantinian" or "Salmasian" fragments.<sup>30</sup>

The literary production of the next two centuries is too scanty to judge the processes going on in historiography, but the beginning of the ninth century produced three prominent historiographers at once: George Synkellos, Theophanes the Confessor, and Nikephoros the Patriarch. The *Chronography* of George Synkellos has been underestimated for a long time and only quite recently has become a subject of investigation.<sup>31</sup>

George's *Chronography* is in many aspects much

<sup>27</sup> It would be of interest to trace the gradual substitution of paratactic constructions by hypotactic ones in medieval historiography.

<sup>28</sup> Parataxis in the early Middle Ages "ceased to be an element of style, it remained an ingrained unit of organisation and presentation of both characters and plots" (W. Ginsberg, *The Cast of Characters: The Representation of Personality in Ancient and Medieval Literature* [Toronto, 1983], 89).

<sup>29</sup> One can refer, for instance, to the text of the fragment concerning Augustus; see Ioannes Antiochenus fr. 78 in *FHG*, IV (Paris, 1851), 568.

<sup>30</sup> See Krumbacher, *Geschichte*, 335 ff; Hunger, *Byzantinische profane Literatur*, 327; F. R. Walton, "A Neglected Historical Text," *Historia* 14 (1965), 236 ff.

<sup>31</sup> See the article by J. Laqueur in *RE* 2.R., Bd. 4, s.v. Synkellos, 1388–1410.

more cultivated and sophisticated a work than that of John Malalas, but his way of portraying characters does not differ much from John's method. George's text lacks *somatopsychogrammata* but contains a number of epithets applied to its heroes. These epithets are probably much more numerous and various than those of John Malalas, but they are of the same abstract and generalized nature and are also devoid of connection with each other as in the work of the earliest Byzantine chroniclers. The same can be said of the feelings and connections between the emotions and deeds of the characters. The author is very busy with chronological calculations and with confronting the different versions of historical events given by different writers; he pays little attention to the qualities and peculiarities of the participants in events, which are, as a rule, marginal to the narrative.

The style of depicting characters of George's pupil and continuator, Theophanes the Confessor, differs slightly from that of his master, but some problems arise and need to be discussed further. The first of them has been examined in detail by I. Čičurov.<sup>32</sup> By the time of Theophanes the notion of the perfect type of emperor had already been formed in Byzantine literature. This notion was not abstract, but was embodied in the concrete historical figure of the first Byzantine basileus, Constantine the Great. By Theophanes' day, in the works of Byzantine writers the image of Constantine the Great had already become a sort of paradigm or standard according to which all rulers were to be judged and described. All their qualities came to be regarded as corresponding or not corresponding to the catalogue of virtues embodied in Constantine. The presence of a corresponding virtue was considered as positive, its lack as negative.

This method of representing historical figures was applied not only to emperors, but also to virtually every class of personages (clergy, warriors, women, etc.); they all had their "perfect model," a set of certain virtues obligatory in this kind of person. This method, typical of medieval literature, is labeled differently by different scholars. D. Lihachev prefers the name "literary etiquette";<sup>33</sup> W. Ginsberg defines it as "literary typology."<sup>34</sup> In es-

sence, they mean the same thing. This mode was unknown to Malalas and his contemporaries and, as far as we know, was for the first time introduced into Byzantine historiography by Theophanes the Confessor. Being a reflection of the medieval mode of thinking in general, it was repeated (or imitated?) in autocratic states of modern times. For instance, there existed in the Soviet Union a sort of counterpart to Constantine the Great in the person of Lenin, who very soon after his death was turned into a legendary and imaginary person embodying all possible virtues. The presence or lack of a definite set of virtues supposedly possessed by Lenin became a criterion for evaluating persons in life, literature, and art.

This innovation is not the only one found in Theophanes' *Chronography*. In order to outline the next one it is necessary to take as an example some historical persons depicted by the writer. For this purpose I have chosen Emperor Nikephoros I (802–811) and Empress Irene (797–802) for the reason that the last part of the *Chronography*, in which they are active, is the original creation of Theophanes and not based on written sources. The mode of depicting characters is here genuine rather than borrowed from his predecessors.<sup>35</sup>

Nikephoros is presented by Theophanes as an absolutely negative person in all aspects, opposite to the image of the ideal emperor. Theophanes called him *παραλογιστής* (fallacious, Theoph., 479.31),<sup>36</sup> *παρανομώτατος* (lawless, 480.22), *θραυσδειλός* (braggart, 490.11), *παριφάγος* (voracious, 488.1), and so on. The emperor is godless, cruel, hypocritical, and cowardly. No trait of his is positive, and black is the only color used to depict him. Following the custom of Byzantine writers, the hero is linked to biblical and mythological persons. In this case these are Phalaris, Achaab, and Pharaoh. The accumulation of negative features of different sorts is typical of the paratactic method of characterization described above, but in the case of Nikephoros there appears a phenomenon previously unknown in chronicles. Among the distinctive traits of Nikephoros, one feature is evidently repeated much more often than the others and, in a sense, dominates them: avarice (*φιλαργυρία*). It is avarice that Theophanes mentions first of all as

<sup>32</sup> I. Čičurov, "Mesto 'Chronografi' Feofana v rannevizantijskoj istoriografičeskoj tradicii," in *Drevnejšie gosudarstva na territorii SSSR* (Moscow, 1981), 79 f.

<sup>33</sup> D. Lihachev, *Čelovek v literaturnoj Drevnej Rusi* (Moscow, 1970), passim.

<sup>34</sup> Ginsberg, *Cast of Characters*, 72 ff.

<sup>35</sup> I cannot agree with the statement of P. Speck, who supposes that even the last part of the *Chronography* was based on different written sources; see P. Speck, *Kaiser Konstantin VI: Die Legitimation einer fremden und der Versuch einer eigener Herrschaft* (Münich, 1978), 389 ff.

<sup>36</sup> *Theophanis Chronographia*, ed. C. de Boor (Leipzig, 1883).

the vice of Nikephoros (470.30). The same vice is not forgotten in the final characterization of the emperor (491.29 ff). Since avarice is the main cause of the ten crimes committed by Nikephoros (487.20 ff), it is the defect for which he is constantly accused in the *Chronography*—not only during his life but also after his death (477.30 ff, 478.21 ff, 480.3, 483.1, 485.21, 487.20, 489.21 ff, 490.23, 492.15 ff, 493.34, 494.11, 498.9, etc.).

There is no doubt that avarice and cupidity were truly characteristics of the historical Nikephoros (in any case writers independent of Theophanes ascribe this quality to him).<sup>37</sup> But the main thing to be stressed here is not that the emperor's avarice was indisputable but that the hero of a historical narrative is now characterized by a dominant feature.

The next character to be discussed here, Irene, was the immediate predecessor of Nikephoros on the imperial throne. At first sight she seems to present a real contrast to the godless scoundrel Nikephoros. Her accession to power was proclaimed as a revelation of God's desire to dissipate impiety (454.16). Her overthrow was considered a disaster for the whole state (477.8 ff). But in reality Theophanes' attitude to Irene is not so simple. After relating some events of her reign, the author refers to the devil, who, constantly envying piety, provoked a quarrel between the mother (Irene) and the son (Constantine). The next pages, relating the story of their struggle, are apparently hostile to Irene. The epithet εὐσεβῆς (pious), applied to her earlier, disappears entirely from the text, and the historiographer not only fails to conceal all evil deeds committed by Irene (including the blinding of her own son) but even stresses her initiative in these crimes (469.23 ff, 472.18 ff). As the reader becomes accustomed to this new attitude toward Irene, the author's approach suddenly changes again and Irene, after her enthronement as autocratic ruler, recovers her lost attribute εὐσεβῆς (474.16, 475.28, 476.5, 479.5, etc), merits praise as σοφὴ καὶ θεοφιλής (wise and God-loving, 477.32), and, moreover, begins to be depicted in a real hagiographical manner.<sup>38</sup>

The contradictions in Irene's personality have been noted by scholars and quite correctly explained as Theophanes' different attitude to different aspects of her activity: nothing can be more natural than to praise the empress for the restora-

tion of icons and to blame her for blinding her son.<sup>39</sup>

Nevertheless, Irene's image is of interest from the point of view of literary history. First of all, Irene is not unique in Theophanes' work. Some examples of similar contradictions have been observed by Čičurov.<sup>40</sup> In reality, one can see here not only a contradiction between characterization and deeds but also between the deeds themselves. "Positive" and "negative" deeds are juxtaposed without further explanation.

Such juxtaposition seems characteristic not only of Byzantine but also of other literature of the early Middle Ages. As Ginsberg points out, "because medieval literature was modelled on the style of the Bible it would not demand precise correlation between qualities of characters or events in the narrative."<sup>41</sup> One may question the decisive influence of biblical style on medieval literature, but the lack of correlation between qualities of character, deeds, or events is obvious. The same phenomenon in Old Russian chronicles has been observed by I. Eremin.<sup>42</sup> A typical example is Jaroslav the Wise in "Povest Vremennih Let" (the *Primary Chronicle*). Some historical persons in the chronicle do not remain the same, but are constantly transformed from one episode to the next. In each they are depicted through different methods and styles (epic, hagiographical, chronological, etc.) and their character and behavior alter accordingly. A coward can become brave, a scoundrel can become saintly, and so on. Afterwards they can persist in the new state or return to the previous one. Unlike his English colleague, Eremin sees the explanation not in the Bible but in the fragmentary character of the chronicle and in the lack of coherent narration typical of archaic forms of literature. Irrespective of the causes suggested by scholars, the identity of the phenomenon itself, as observed in Byzantine, western medieval, and Old Russian literature, can hardly be questioned.<sup>43</sup> Equally there can be no doubt that this phenomenon is related to the asyndetic

<sup>37</sup> See Beck, "Zur byzantinischen Mönchschronik," 194.

<sup>38</sup> See "Mesto 'Chronografi' Feofana," 120 ff. A striking contradiction can be seen in the above-mentioned story of Michael II, who is characterized as intrepid (ἀφοβος, 52.24) and then some pages later as cowardly and weak (εἰς ἀνανδοίσαν καὶ μαλακίαν διαβεβόητο, 52.21).

<sup>39</sup> Ginsberg, *Cast of Characters*, 96.

<sup>40</sup> I. Eremin, *Literatura Drevnej Rusi (etudy i charakteristiki)* (Moscow, 1966), 43 f.

<sup>41</sup> It is remarkable that many scholars, noticing the lack of correlation between the qualities of persons in chronicles, did not see the real reason for the phenomenon and supposed in each case the contamination of different contradictory sources (e.g.,

<sup>37</sup> See Čičurov, "Mesto 'Chronografi' Feofana," 129.

<sup>38</sup> One can even observe a change in the style of the narration: see especially Irene's speech after her overthrow (478.4 ff).

and paratactic character of early historiography.

It would be of interest to survey the feelings and emotions proper to the characters of the last "original" part of the *Chronography*. In the last fifty pages of de Boor's edition, Theophanes' heroes show fear (φοβέω, πτοέω, καταπλαγής, 11 times) or they grieve (λυπέομαι, 9 times). Other emotions are mentioned only once or twice. It is remarkable that the "positive" Irene is mainly presented as λυπουμένη (grieving, 457.12, 469.19), while the behavior of the "negative" Nikephoros constantly provokes laughter (480.26, 483.20, 485.23). Seriousness, even grief, was considered indicative of a "good" state of mind, while gaiety indicated a "bad" one (Jesus Christ never smiles!).

The next specimen of historiography that is of concern for our purpose is the composition of an anonymous author usually called *Scriptor Incertus de Leone Armenio*.<sup>44</sup> Preserved in fragments, this chronicle was created at the end of the ninth century, that is, more than half a century after the work of Theophanes.<sup>45</sup> It should be noted that what mainly distinguishes this work from previous ones is the author's intention not only to inform, but also to impress his reader. As is usual in the early Middle Ages, this aim could be achieved only by rhetorical means and the text assumes a strong rhetorical flavor. This is achieved not only through the many speeches put into the mouths of historical persons and the constant employment of rhetorical figures, but through impressive and emotive episodes inserted into the text.<sup>46</sup>

A certain rhetorical flavor is proper even to the *somatopsychogrammata* found in this composition. The largest and most interesting of them is that of Nikephoros I: "This man was short, large, pot-bellied, hairy, with prominent lips, big face, com-

Šachmatov for Russian chronicles). In the case of Irene, such an explanation was proposed by P. Speck (see above, note 35).

<sup>44</sup>There are two fragments of this chronicle: (1) "Scriptor incertus de Leone Armenio," in *Leonis Grammatici Chronographia*, Bonn ed. (1857), 355 ff; (2) H. Grégoire, "Un nouveau fragment du 'Scriptor incertus de Leone Armenio,'" *Byzantion* 12 (1936), 421 ff.

<sup>45</sup>Some scholars believe this work to have been written by a contemporary of the events, i.e., about 820–840, but in my opinion the arguments of Tomić are sufficient to date it after 864; see L. Tomić, "Fragmenti jednog istoriskog spisa IX veka," *ZRVI* 21.1 (1952), 78 ff.

<sup>46</sup>See, for instance, the story of the flight of the Byzantines after the lost battle of 811. During the flight the soldiers have to cross the river. Many horsemen enter it and drown with their horses. Their corpses form a sort of bridge, and the enemy crosses the river over it. The Byzantines, thinking that they had already been saved, unexpectedly see the enemy at their backs (ed. Grégoire, p. 424).

pletely gray beard and stout body. He was very prudent, wicked, sharp (especially in fiscal affairs), penurious, and extremely fond of money—this was the reason for his ruin" (ed. Grégoire, p. 425).<sup>47</sup> Manifestly, this characterization is not a set of juxtaposed, neutral attributes but in some ways a real portrait painted by a hostile hand.<sup>48</sup>

A certain rhetorical flavor can also be seen in the mode of presenting the feelings and emotions of heroes. In essence these emotions are not much more varied than they were before, but sometimes they are aggravated and exaggerated by rhetorical means. Here is the description of the desperate Nikephoros: "He could not understand anything around him, his mental facilities were in disorder, he behaved like an insane man, was out of his mind, and became confused because of everything" (ed. Grégoire, p. 423). The accumulation of analogous epithets and verbs depicts very vividly Nikephoros' state of mind. Rhetoric had always concerned itself with human nature (remember the ἡθοποιία): its intrusion into historiography contributed much to the abilities of the authors to represent their characters.

Like some figures of Theophanes, the heroes of the *Scriptor Incertus* have their distinctive features, the best example being Leo V, who is eight times called a "liar" and an "ever-changing person" (χαμαλέων, see the *Scr. Inc.*, 341.5, 356.8, 356.14, 357.1, 358.1, 358.16, 359.16, 360.13). To sum up, a certain progress can be traced in the mode of depicting characters in Byzantine historiography of the eighth to ninth centuries; it nevertheless belongs to the system that I call "paratactic."

The first real changes can be seen only in the next century, namely, in the historical composition usually called the "Continuation of Theophanes." This work (an immediate continuation of the *Chronography* of Theophanes the Confessor) has been underestimated by modern scholars, who saw it mainly as a source of historical material rather than a work of aesthetic value. The only exception was R. Jenkins, who regarded the Continuation of Theophanes as a turning point in the progress of Byzantine historiography<sup>49</sup> and stressed its artistic value. Unfortunately Jenkins did not put forward many arguments in favor of his position, and

<sup>47</sup>I do not agree with Grégoire that these *somatopsychogrammata* are an argument for considering the whole work as a continuation of Malalas' *Chronography*.

<sup>48</sup>We have already noted that love of money was a true quality of Nikephoros.

<sup>49</sup>R. Jenkins, "The Classical Background of the *Scriptores post Theophanem*," *DOP* 8 (1954), 13 ff.

scholars after him have paid little attention to it. The following remarks are intended to outline the problem. The modern scholar accustomed to analyzing early medieval chronicles cannot help notice that some features of the continuation of Theophanes (I mean, first and foremost, the first four books)<sup>50</sup> did not totally fit the historiographical system of the period. The points of distinction are especially evident if the work is compared with contemporary historiography (George the Monk, Pseudo-Symeon, Genesios). First of all, this affects the way historical material is arranged. The work of the Continuator of Theophanes is divided into separate books and, in contrast to Theophanes, each of the first five books describes the reign of a particular emperor. This must not be regarded as an unusual phenomenon, because almost all historiographers after Theophanes rejected his analistic way of arranging material and returned to the principles of *Kaisergeschichte*. But there is a great difference between George the Monk, Pseudo-Symeon, Genesios, etc., on the one hand and the Continuator of Theophanes on the other. While George the Monk and others used emperors' names as mere marks (a kind of *eponymoi*) for separate parts of the narrative, the narrative itself remained a juxtaposition of events of different sorts in the old manner. The Continuator of Theophanes truly concentrates the action around the main hero, moving from the periphery toward the center of the story. This becomes especially clear after comparing the stories by the Continuator with corresponding parts of the "Book of Kings" by Genesios. Both texts have a common source, treated by the authors in quite different ways: Genesios used mainly the old method of juxtaposing events, while the Continuator rearranged the material in a new way.<sup>51</sup> Previously absolutely dominant, the paratactic principle of composition begins to yield to a hypotactic construction. A similar development may be observed in the language of the work. Only linguistic research can prove statistically the process of replacement of paratactic sentences by hypotactic ones, but such a trend can be established even without special analyses.

It must be pointed out that a sort of "hypotactic" principle becomes apparent even in the manner of

<sup>50</sup> I will not discuss here the problems of the work's authorship. It is obvious, however, that the sixth book did not belong to it originally.

<sup>51</sup> See J. Ljubarskij, "Theophanes Continuatus und Genesios: Das Problem der gemeinsamen Quelle," *BSL* 48.1 (1987), 21 ff. For details on the composition of the Continuation of Theophanes, see *idem*, "Nabljudjenja nad kompozitsiej 'Chronografii' Prodolžatelja Feofana," *VizVrem* 49 (1988), 70–99.

thinking itself: from time to time—and unusual for the historiographers of the period—the Continuator stresses the necessity for the author to reveal the causal connections between events.<sup>52</sup>

The same can be observed in the methods of depicting historical figures.<sup>53</sup> In the first book of the Continuator we twice come across a person named John Hexabule (Theoph. Cont., 17.1 ff, 34.13 ff).<sup>54</sup> In both cases the man is described as "skilled in the recognition of the nature and disposition of people." Although this capacity was rare at the time, it was not alien to the author of the work. In contrast to his predecessors, the anonymous writer tends to pay special attention to the peculiar, momentary traits of his characters. He is able to notice for instance, how the face of the Armenian Vardan changed on hearing bad news (8.8 ff), a strange pose assumed by the court jester Dendris (92.14 ff), and so on. He accurately marks the movement of souls and the reactions of the heroes. The rebel Thomas the Slav receiving a bad message becomes upset at first but then calms down (65.14 ff); Michael Rangabe, hearing about the rebellion, was shaken in his soul, but remained firm of mind (17.24). In such statements there is nothing unusual to the modern reader, but they were really new in tenth-century Byzantium. It is better to demonstrate this "new style" of depicting characters with examples from among the principal heroes of the work.

I leave aside two of the five emperors described in the first five books of the Continuator (Michael III and Basil I) because they are depicted by the "old" method of *Schwarzweissmalerei*, although these figures are also of concern for our purpose.<sup>55</sup>

Michael II is one of the most negative persons in the *Chronography*. His negative and fatal role is predicted at the very beginning of the work (19.5 ff). At one of his first appearances he is called a "chatterer and insolent" (34.3–4) and then "blood-thirsty and intrepid" (41.24), but detailed description then follows: brought up by Jews and Athinganoi, he was devoted to his heresy and as he grew up he could not shed his ignorance and

<sup>52</sup> See A. Kazhdan, "Iz istorij vizantijskoj chronografii X veka," *VizVrem* 21 (1962), 95–117.

<sup>53</sup> J. Ljubarskij, "Homme, Destinée, Providence," in *La philosophie grecque et sa portée culturelle et historique* (Moscow, 1986).

<sup>54</sup> *Theophanes Continuatus, Ioannes Camenita, Symeon Magister, Georgius Monachus*, Bonn ed., (1838).

<sup>55</sup> Describing Basil I, Constantine Porphyrogenitus (he is supposed to be the author of the fifth book) used the methods of encomium, originally alien to historiography (P. Alexander, "Secular Biography at Byzantium," *Speculum* 15 [1940], 194–209). For Michael III see J. Ljubarskij, "Der Kaiser als Mime," *JÖB* 37 (1987), 39–50.

roughness (ἀγροικία καὶ ἀμαθία, 43.6). He hated learning and, though a king, knew and liked only things proper to a simple peasant (43.17 ff). Both qualities, ignorance and roughness and, as their result, impiety (ἀσέβεια), became from that point on distinctive features of the hero and determine his behavior. Michael persecutes iconophiles, insults the faith, despises Hellenic reasoning, neglects divine knowledge; he was so ignorant that he could hardly recognize the letters of his own name (49.12 ff).

All these qualities peculiar to him from the very beginning gradually intensify and reach their climax in the middle of the narrative where Michael earns the name of “wild beast” (Θῆρος ἄγροις). One peculiarity of Michael II has still to be pointed out. Six times during the short narration the emperor's lisp is mentioned (his nickname τραυλός means lisping). Curiously enough, this external trait is linked to his essence: his soul is as lisping as his speech (52.20–21).

Not all the “negative” persons of the *Chronography* are painted in black. Much more complex are the figures of Leo V and Theophilos. From the very beginning of the story the characterization of Leo is rather diverse. He is bellicose, bloodthirsty, famous for his courage; he is ugly, huge, but at the same time refined in his speech (6.10 ff)! Raised to the heights of power from a low condition, he displayed ingratitude to his former benefactor, but at the same time showed courage fighting the Arabs (10.20 ff). Afterwards, being incapable of thinking honestly and reasonably, Leo was seized by ambitions for power, betrayed the emperor, and became the basileus himself. As can be seen, Leo's figure before his usurpation is balanced between plus and minus, and this ambiguity persists throughout the story. Leo is blamed for seizing power, which is only natural, but the author spares no efforts to show Leo's hesitations prior to his decision to seize power. The writer himself is not sure whether the usurper is sincere in his hesitations or merely pretending to delay (16.15 ff). This ambivalence in the appreciation of the hero and the motives for his behavior stress the ambivalence of his character. External circumstances helped him reveal totally the mean qualities of his nature. Leo gained a victory over the Bulgarians, and “this victory added much to his insolence and impudence and stimulated the cruelty that characterized him” (25.20 ff).

The next impulse for the “deterioration” of Leo's character was also external in nature: this was the pseudo-prediction of the monk Symbatios

who demanded that the emperor put a stop to icon worship. Now the author blames Leo as a demonic image, the slave of ignorance, as silent as a shadow, and so on (27.3 ff). The Continuator of Theophanes seems to have forgotten that some pages before he had praised Leo's refined speech!

Interestingly, however, as soon as the invective has reached its climax, it loses its vigor and the narrative, all of a sudden, begins to sound different. It might seem that after such invective, praises of Leo are unlikely to be found, but this is exactly what happens. According to the author, this “scoundrel” was very preoccupied with the affairs of the state and spared no efforts in dealing with them. He concerned himself with legal matters, etc. (30.6 ff). Here, too, the writer uses the entire palette to depict his hero as a statesman. According to one of the characters in the work, after Leo's death the state lost not only a cruel person but also a zealot for the common good. Curiously enough, the final, necrological characterization of Leo is also ambiguous: impiety and cruelty were typical of him, and they compromised his concern for the wellbeing of the state, which was also typical of him (40.4 ff).

The peculiarities of the description of Leo become still more apparent in the next story concerning Theophilos. Already the first episodes give the impression of a certain ambivalence in the evaluation of the hero. “He wanted to have a reputation as a defender of justice and laws, but in reality he feigned with the aim of protecting himself from conspirators” (85.1 ff). In order to demonstrate this statement the writer narrates a story of provocation, arranged by Theophilos with the aim of finding and punishing the former conspirators against his father. “Theophilos is likely to be worthy of praise for his devotion to the law, but gentleness and soft-heartedness are hardly the qualities to be ascribed to him” (86.6 ff), concludes the author.

Having condemned Leo for his deeds and lack of soft-heartedness, the writer is eager to play down the impression and quite unexpectedly adds that Leo acted well by expelling his stepmother from the capital, because her marriage to Michael had been considered illegal (86.8–9). Continuing the positive evaluation of Leo, the Continuator pretends to forget his own idea that the love of justice was for the emperor a sort of hypocrisy and praises him for his conduct at trials. “For good people he was astonishing, for bad ones awful—this was because he hated evil and loved justice, was severe and inflexible,” writes the author (86.19

ff). After this there follows a long passage on his good deeds, concluding with an exalted appreciation: "In such deeds was Leo marvelous and astonishing" (99.4 ff). At this point one would expect new praises, but the tone changes abruptly in the same phrase: ". . . regarding the iconophiles, alas, as a savage barbarian he did his best to exceed everybody in cruelty. . ." A new set of episodes illustrate the brutality of "the most cruel of the cruel," "the most loathsome of loathsome men," Theophilos.

Once again the reproaches of Theophilos reach a new climax and at the same moment the tone of the narrative changes abruptly and there follow stories about the emperor's devotion to the church, about his singing, and about his feats of valor in war. His last speech before his death, noble and refined, provokes tears in his listeners and is to be compared to the analogous speeches of heroes of classical historiography.

The way of painting historical figures (in particular Leo V and Theophilos) employed by the Continuator of Theophanes is contradictory in its essence and would have seemed strange if we had not met a similar phenomenon in the *Chronography* of Theophanes the Confessor. Positive and negative deeds and traits are mixed in the characters, the pendulum of evaluation constantly swings between the absolute positive and absolute negative. As usual, this has led some scholars to assume that the sources used by the author differed in their attitude to Leo and Theophilos; they even believed that the Continuator of Theophanes might have employed some iconoclastic sources praising the emperors and that he mechanically combined information of different sorts.<sup>56</sup> As a rule, this kind of supposition is questionable and has no real foundation. More probably, there were not different sources but rather different methods of image construction. But these methods do not coincide in all details with those used by Theophanes the Confessor; on the contrary, the difference between the two is very significant. Theophanes did not try to combine different, sometimes even opposing features of his heroes but simply juxtaposed them (typical of the "paratactic system" mentioned

<sup>56</sup> See, e.g., F. Barišić, "Les sources de Génésios et du Continuateur de Théophane pour l'histoire du règne de Michel II (820–829)," *Byzantion* 31 (1961), 263.

above), while the Continuator of Theophanes wanted, as it were, to bring them into relation. There appears here for the first time in Byzantine historiography a sort of image structure. Though still unbalanced, this image structure presents a kind of construction with internal ties and connections between elements, in contrast to the *somato-psychogrammata* in which the elements (personal traits) are juxtaposed in an order dictated by a scheme imposed from without.

A good example is provided by the first chapters of the story of Theophilos, in which the combination of different qualities of the hero and their "transition" from one to another are obviously expressed by different hypotactic, adversarial, and other conjunctions very rarely used by the early historiographers. The distinction in artistic methods appears also on the linguistic level. One can say that parataxis is gradually being replaced by hypotaxis, that is, one mode of thinking by another.

Such was the level of presenting characters in Byzantine historiography reached by the end of the tenth century. The progress made by historical writers since Malalas is evident.<sup>57</sup> This progress can be observed clearly enough because we are able to see its final result—I mean the *Chronographia* of Michael Psellos. It is this historical work in which "hypotactic" principles of delineating historical figures begins to dominate and characters at last obtain some kind of structure. (This is the reason why, when reading Psellos' *Chronographia*, we sometimes lose the sense of the distance of nine centuries that divide us from the medieval writer.) The distinction between the Continuator of Theophanes and Psellos was still great, but it could no longer be considered an unbridgeable gulf. The task of building such a bridge could be done only by a great author, an artist like Michael Psellos.

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<sup>57</sup> There can be no doubt that the growing interest in individuals, their appearance, qualities, emotions, and feelings is a distinctive feature of the epoch, shared in the 10th century by other genres of literature and art as well. See F. Tinnefeld, "Hagiographie und Humanismus: Die Darstellung menschlicher Empfindungen in den Viten des Metaphrastes," *17th International Byzantine Congress. Abstracts of Short Papers* (Washington, D.C., 1986), 351–53. I do not touch here on the problem of the extent to which this growing interest is connected with the classical tradition and the so-called "Macedonian Renaissance."